

Here we are on Easter morning. A great day, one you would hope signals the beginning of warm spring days, not more cold snow storms, but hey, we did choose to live here. It's our own fault for that. But Easter just screams, fresh; fresh flowers, fresh bright colors, new dresses, and a throw back to yester-year, sometimes even an occasional Easter bonnet or two. We love Easter because it is bright, it is filled with new life, new hope. At heart, and through our faith, we are Easter People living in the hope and in the possibility of the new. I won't even say in the hope of the resurrection, because I don't know that is how we really look at Easter. The best I think we sometimes give this Holiday is the sense of a new start, a new spring, a new season. Perhaps things will be different now.

But so often, come Monday, they are not. Come Monday we head back to our jobs, back to our chaotic schedules, back to our classrooms, back to the realities of the world that bombard us with demands, depressing news, and the doldrums of life. The problem is we are trying to be Easter People while we live in this Good Friday type world. You know the children's message may seem like a joke, but Horton, who was trying to hold on to a belief, had some rather ominous odds to face. Everybody was out to get him. They didn't believe.

In our scripture text, after the Sabbath, or their Sunday, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary headed to the tomb. This was not a joyful trip, or one they were looking forward to. This was a trip life had forced them to do. This was a trip that they had to make even though it meant facing all of their shattered dreams and hopes... they were going to dress the body of the one they thought was going to be their savior. I can only imagine the grief in their hearts, weighing them down, almost breaking forth from within them. Perhaps they were even working on auto pilot. You know how people can get when they are going through intense grief, they become like robots, not feeling because that will hurt too much. They are afraid of the pain that they know is hovering there, waiting to consume them.

Into the realities of their lives the two Mary's walk and suddenly the shock of a lifetime and they hear, "Do not be afraid." The earth shakes, an angel descends, a massive stone rolls away, and they are blinded by a dazzling light. Do not be afraid? "Do not be afraid." This is my message the angel tells them. "Do not be afraid." The guards are dumbstruck with fear, but the women are struck from their fear. "Jesus is not here, he has been raised." "Don't be afraid, go and tell. Jesus Lives!" The message of Easter is given to them and they are sent out, back into the world. You see that is what makes us Easter People in a Good Friday world. We have been blessed with this amazing, unbelievable message that Jesus lives. Regardless of what you face on Sunday, Monday, or any day, Jesus lives, and that changes everything. "Don't be afraid."

Remember this verse was used before when Jesus came into our world. The angel came that earlier time and told the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news for all people. Now go and tell.” They had a lot to fear as well in doing this. Not just fear of an angel, but it was well known that you did not mess with King Herod, especially by going and proclaiming the birth of someone he would see as a threat to replace him. But the angel’s message was to not fear, because by the birth of Christ, just as with the resurrection of Christ, it changes things. It changes our reality and who we are. It changes our identity as those baptized into Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. It not only changes lives, but it creates life itself. That is the new life that Easter brings. Not necessarily making our Good Friday world go away, but by changing its power and showing us the hope that this world is not all there is. It is a message that brings life, even to a snowy and cold hearted world. It is a message that is meant to be shared so others might believe and find new life.

[In the children sermon] you {may have} heard me tell of this new movie coming out, “Horton Hears A Who.” Now I was raised on Dr. Seuss stories so this one came back to me without even seeing the movie. To remind you, while relaxing in the jungle, Horton the elephant heard a distinctive voice coming from what seems to be a tiny speck floating on the breeze. “A still small voice” if you want a biblical reference. Horton manages to rescue the speck, and discovers a truth that an entire tiny world, populated by the “Whos”, lives upon it. The problem is he is the only one who can hear them, hear and believe it. Horton's unusual behavior catches the attention of a jungle busy-body Kangaroo, who tells Horton that he is delusional. The only things that are real, she tells him, are those things that you can see with your eyes, that we can all hear, and also touch with our hands. Remind you of any disciples we know? This Kangaroo however, launches a campaign to destroy the speck, Horton’s mission, and have him caged. But no matter the threats, Horton remains faithful to his charge "one-hundred percent," and in the process helps the entire jungle to learn the truth as well. Do you remember Horton mantra, “I meant what I said, I said what I meant, an elephant’s faithful 100%.” A children’s tale we claim, but perhaps it is the children who can teach us.

A few years ago my wife and I were going out for the evening and hired a babysitter named Michael. He had agreed to sit for us but was having second thoughts because he had just found out earlier that morning that his grandmother had passed away. He was very close to her and was going to call us and cancel but felt he perhaps he should just do this because it would be a good distraction from facing the reality of her death. The kids quickly had Michael engaged in various games and play. Mike felt like all was going well, but then it was time for bed and the kids ran and got their pajamas on (you know how they do for a babysitter but never for mom & dad). He had told them to get their favorite books for bedtime stories. My daughter Sarah, 6 at the time brought out her Beginner Bible and said, Michael read mine first, read mine first. She said this is her favorite, and opened the book up right to the story of Jesus rising from the dead. Right then it all hit Michael; his grandmothers death, his grief, his fear, his avoidance, it all hit him as he read these words, “Jesus is not hear,

the Angel said. He is alive! Go tell his friends that they will get to see him again! Mary was not sad anymore. Jesus was not dead. He was alive! She ran back to tell the wonderful news. At First, Jesus; friends did not believe her. But she was right! Jesus did come back to see him. He really was alive!” Sarah turned to Mike and said, “I love that part.” Michael paused, trying to hold back the tears and replied, “Me too, me too.” Do not be afraid, we are Easter People living in a Good Friday world.

Look at the opening line yesterday’s Star Tribune article. “Their love and faith were stronger than their fear.” This was the story of Dick Engwall’s good friends, Danny Adams Sr. and Danny Adams Jr., two otherwise healthy men who shockingly died this past week after coming down with the flu. Their close nit community still came out in droves to support the Adams family even as the fear was building that the disease was most likely still lingering in the community. They were all able to face down their fear precisely because they had such strong faith in God. They knew of Christ’ love, they knew of his promise of eternal life and they came to share that again with this family as they grieved. You see, Easter changes things, it empowers people, it creates life and brings community together when fear would otherwise crush it. Do not be afraid, Easter has power!

My very first day here at Gethsemane, last Wednesday, I was one hour in the door, I had just brought in the last box of books, when I had to drop them so I could assist with the funeral service of one of Gethsemane’s saints, Wayne Hoganson. Now you all know Wayne much better than I do but as I sat in the service and listened to the scripture chosen and the stories shared about him, I was struck. I was struck because there is no better way to enter into the real marrow of what Holy Week is all about than in a funeral. To sit and proclaim the promise of God, the promise of forgiveness, the promise of life, while all we have to look at is the dust we are and the dust we become. The words read that day from the text of Isaiah, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name and you are mine.” Do not be afraid, Easter has power! The cross and the grave have power and they have given these words traction. They mean something in our world and the empty tomb has set them all a blaze! Do not be afraid, for there is power in Easter!

Alleluia. Christ has Risen..... *“He has risen indeed. Alleluia!”*

So what happens after our Sabbath? What happens tomorrow for you? What do you go back to and how do you go? Do you go back to the same fears and for boarding, or are you different? You have heard the “good news” of Christ, a message meant to change your life regardless of what you face.

Do not be afraid... and I mean that,

I meant what I said, I said what I meant, because God is faithful 100% ! **Amen.**